Black Press

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Chopper crashes linked to border drug scheme

Fatal crash on Othello Road in '05 also cited

By Cheryl Wierda
Black Press

A Chilliwack man who police believe was behind the controls of a helicopter that crashed in Abbotsford last year has been charged in connection with what law enforcement authorities call "one of the most brazen" schemes to smuggle drugs across the Canada-U.S. border.

Dustin Haugen, 24, is one of more than 40 people arrested in a two-year-old police operation targeting drug smuggling, and is believed to have been the pilot of a helicopter, allegedly linked to the smuggling, which crashed on 58 Avenue in 2005.

At a press conference in Bellingham Thursday, authorities from the U.S. and Canada unveiled the results - so far - from a police operation targeting a network of smuggling organizations that used aircraft to ferry tons of drugs across the border. The investigation, dubbed Operation Frozen Timber, has resulted in the seizure of 8,000 pounds of marijuana, 800 pounds of cocaine, three aircraft, and $1.5 million in U.S. currency.

"I think that the equipment that was seized was certainly the tip of the iceberg," said RCMP chief superintendent Bud Mercer.

"These organized criminal groups were motivated by one thing - greed," said John McKay, United States Attorney for the Western District of Washington. "With Operation Frozen Timber, we not only cut into their profits with countless seizures of drugs and money, we demonstrated that there is a high price to pay. Drug ring leader Robert Kesling now knows that high price - he is doing 17 years in federal prison."

The B.C.-based smuggling organizations used helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft to transport drug loads to pre-arranged drop sites in the U.S. They smuggled marijuana into the United States, and cocaine into Canada, police say.

Intelligence gathered by authorities revealed there were several independent aerial smuggling cells that essentially

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Great weather drew a big crowd to the Hope Museum grounds on Canada. There was cake and refreshments for everyone — and activities for the kids. Here; Tansy Pauls take a shot at the bean bag toss; where kids could win flags; pencils and other prizes.

BARRY STEWART PHOTO

Local RCMP officer recognized for counterfeit bust

A Hope RCMP officer is being recognized by the Bank of Canada for his work in dismantling a $1.5 million counterfeit operation which spread over several western Canadian provinces.

Cst. Kurtis Bosnell of the Upper Fraser Valley Regional RCMP Detachment and Sgt. Mary Kostashuk (Vancouver commercial crime section) will be receiving the 2006 Bank of Canada Law Enforcement Award of Excellence for Counterfeit Deterrence. The award will be presented to them at the 2006 Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police Conference in St. John's, Newfoundland on Aug. 23.

The award stems from a routine stop more than two years ago.

On May 4, 2004 Hope RCMP highway patrol stopped a vehicle for speeding. The investigation which followed led the police officer to locate a substantial amount of cash and what appeared to be uncut sheets of counterfeit $100 bills.

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